

"If I can help document ... change and thereby highlight the effects of our collective actions on the world and particularly on the invertebrate world, a world rarely noticed by humans but comprising over 90% of the species found on Earth, my retirement will be meaningful to me."

Rich Bray, Volunteer, Rocky Mountain National Park

Citizen Scientists

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Intern Heather Amann prepares to untangle a bird from a mist net so that it can be identified, measured, and banded, as coauthor Paul Super looks on. Amann, interested originally in studying voice in college, served as an intern with Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont and has gone on to major in biology. She says, "My volunteer experience helped me realize that I wanted to pursue a career in environmental science to become a park ranger."

The National Park System is reaping tremendous benefits from volunteers assisting park staffs with developing the scientific knowledge needed to manage natural resources in the national parks. These "citizen scientists" are often high school or college students who may become the professional park scientists of tomorrow. Others, including park neighbors, enjoy contributing to parks they love and learning about science and its role in park management. Retired professionals share their invaluable, lifelong skills with our national parks. Working with professionals who design and manage research projects, citizen scientists extend the range of park science, enabling biological inventories to cover larger areas and sampling more frequently than could be accomplished with paid staff. National parks and their partners recruit participants and provide training and coordination, often in association with one of the 13 learning centers now operating in the national parks. Articles in this chapter reflect an encouraging trend: public involvement in scientific inventories, resource monitoring, and other research and park management endeavors, often aided by Natural Resource Challenge-funded programs. National parks have profited from an engaged and committed volunteer workforce in 2002.